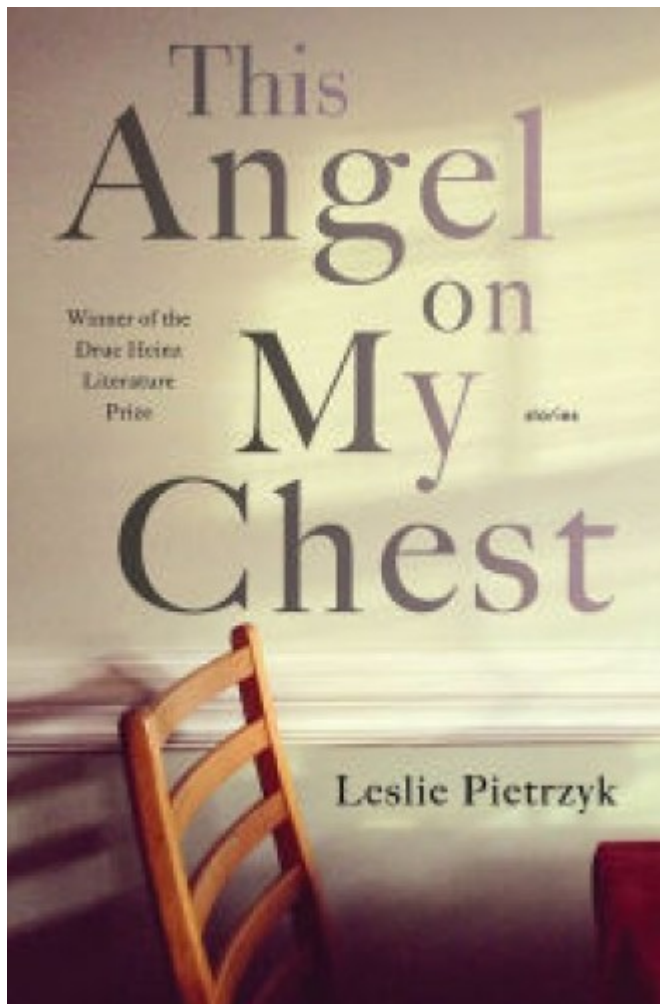


Jill Peláez Baumgaertner's Christmas picks

selected by [Jill Peláez Baumgaertner](#) in the [December 7, 2016](#) issue

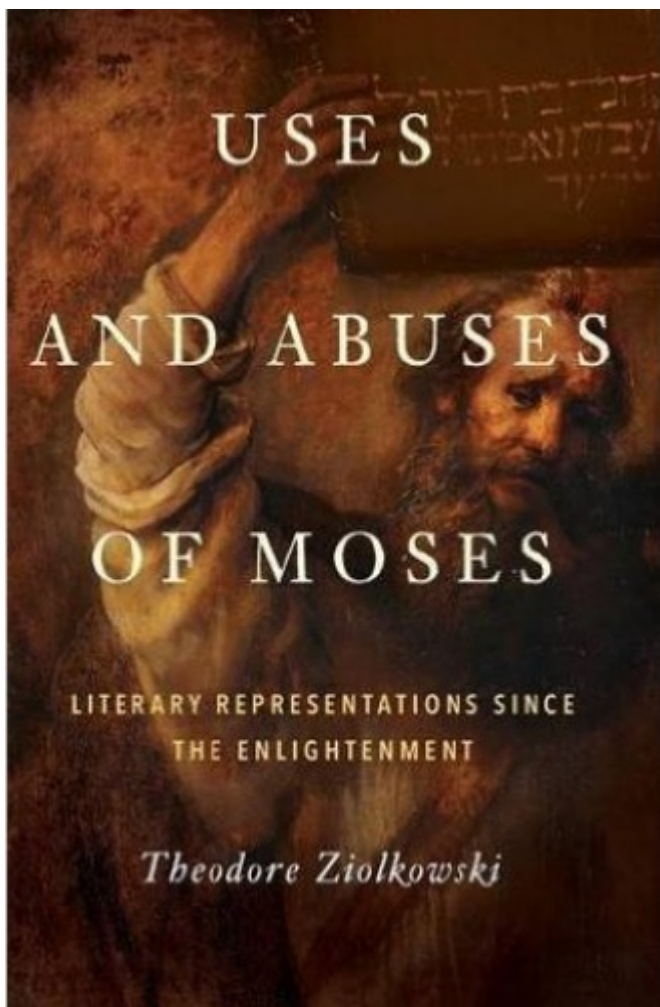
## In Review



### **This Angel on My Chest**

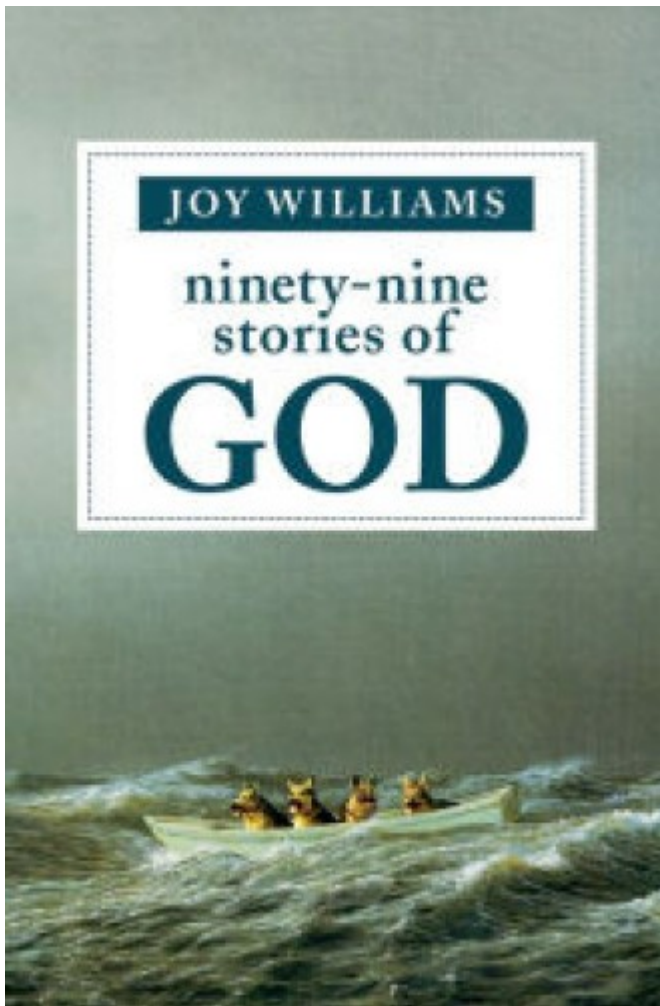
by by Leslie Pietrzyk

University of Pittsburgh Press



## **Uses and Abuses of Moses**

By Theodore Ziolkowski  
University of Notre Dame Press



## **Ninety-Nine Stories of God**

By Joy Williams  
Tin House Books



## **New Selected Poems**

by Les Murray

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live." Joan Didion's words form the epigraph to *This Angel on My Chest* (University of Pittsburgh Press), a most unusual collection of fiction by Leslie Pietrzyk. A widow at the age of 37, Pietrzyk has written 16 stories about young widows who, like her, cope with loss and grief. They've had to figure out how to keep living, the ghosts of husbands with them every day, even after happy remarriages. One woman remembers ten things only she knows about her husband; another creates a multiple-choice quiz in which there are no correct answers, only the conclusion: "You will tell the same story again and again until you know it is true." These stories are about rehearsing a death and learning to live beyond it. Each one is surprising in its own way, well-crafted, and completely heart-wrenching.

*Uses and Abuses of Moses: Literary Representations Since the Enlightenment* (University of Notre Dame Press), by Theodore Ziolkowski, is an encyclopedic overview of a staggering number of novels, poems, plays, and films about Moses from multiple perspectives: Zionist, anti-Zionist, feminist, Methodist, Mormon, magical realist, satirical, and even cynical. The book is descriptive rather than interpretive but in all ways astonishing.

Joy Williams's *Ninety-nine Stories of God* (Tin House Books), a small, edgy collection of stories as short as one sentence and as long as a few paragraphs, presents cockeyed pictures of a god unrecognizable in any venue other than a postmodern dream. Yet somehow they draw you in, fascinating in their droll humor, cynicism, or wisdom.

*New Selected Poems* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), by Les Murray, an Australian considered by some to be the finest living poet writing in English, constantly takes the reader by surprise with its versatility, its odd and wonderful angle of vision, and its artistry.

Read the other 2016 Christmas picks [here](#).